



22nd Legislative District

Representative Sam Hunt Representative Chris Reykdal



Rep. Sam Hunt

E-mail: sam.hunt@leg.wa.gov

Website:

<http://housedemocrats.wa.gov/roster/rep-Sam-Hunt/>

Olympia Office:

438B Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Phone: (360) 786-7992



Rep. Chris Reykdal

E-mail: chris.reykdal@leg.wa.gov

Websites:

<http://housedemocrats.wa.gov/roster/rep-Chris-Reykdal/>

Olympia Office:

319 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Phone: (360) 786-7940

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

It's our great honor to represent the 22nd legislative district in the House of Representatives. We're privileged to be the voice for those who live in Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and parts of unincorporated northern Thurston County. We thank you for allowing us to serve on your behalf.

The last two years at the Legislature have been interesting to say the least. The Legislature operated under a divided government – something that hasn't happened since 2005. While we can celebrate some victories like passage of the DREAM Act, a new majority and differing values in the Senate made it difficult to make significant progress.

The House passed a capital budget that would invest millions improving infrastructure in our local communities and put 2,500 Washingtonians back to work. Unfortunately, our plan was voted down by the Senate Republican coalition 26-23. For the first time in decades, the legislative session ended without sending a capital budget to the Governor. The Senate did not offer a comprehensive plan of its own.

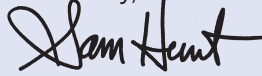
Transportation suffered a similar fate this year. While we were successful in making additional investments in Amtrak and the ferry system, deep divisions within the Senate stalled efforts to make significant investments in our aging transportation infrastructure. The Senate majority is so divided within its own Republican dominated caucus, it has yet to pass a transportation budget after two sessions. And the Senate ignored the transportation revenue package passed by the House.


We were able to reach agreement on a few elements within education, although much of the work is still incomplete. The next few years will be critical in determining what direction we move toward as a state regarding education. This newsletter will hopefully shed some light on how we got here, where we're at today, and where we need to go to ensure all kids in Washington state get the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

Much of this newsletter focuses on education. However, that does not mean we have forgotten or ignored the needs of state employees. COLAs, health insurance costs, and retirement issues will be high priorities that must be addressed in 2015.

Again, it is truly an honor to serve you in the State House of Representatives, please contact our offices with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,


Rep. Sam Hunt


Rep. Chris Reykdal

Education

Our Paramount Duty

Working together, as communities with caring parents and hard-working teachers, we can provide every child in our state the opportunity to have a strong education and a productive future. To accomplish this, we must invest in our children's education now. However, there are factions that would leave our children, our families, and our communities to fend for themselves, neglecting our paramount responsibility to provide every child a vibrant and world-class education. We know it doesn't have to be this way, and we're taking action to build a better future by investing in our children and schools. The two of us worked together this last session with a committed public education coalition to take some very positive steps.

Education – Where We Were

“Reform before revenue!” This is a common line we all hear in our roles as lawmakers. It sounds great on a bumper sticker, but in reality, it doesn't fly. There's no set amount of reform that will satisfy the reformers. There will always be areas to improve what we're doing. That's true for any organization in the public or private sector.

Just look at your workplace as an example. Has your organization refrained from making any efficiency improvements over the last year or two? Probably not. Organizations, including state government, are ALWAYS reforming. To deny public or private entities critical dollars until they meet every reform one can imagine is really just ideological hostage taking.

When it comes to public education in Washington state, we've enacted dozens of reforms in the last two decades. The first major effort was launched by Gov. Booth Gardner. He created the “Governor's Council on Education Reform & Funding” that was charged with developing a long-term education reform plan focused on performance-based results. This commission led to the adoption of House Bill 1209, largely considered the education reform law in our state.

HB 1209 established statewide learning goals, created a timeline for the adoption of standards and assessments, and took a major step in turning around struggling schools.



Since then, we've enacted dozens of additional reforms like creating the A+ Commission to address accountability for student academic achievement, adopted high school graduation benchmarks, created the Professional Educators Standards Board to improve teacher quality and professional development, increased math and science standards, and expanded early learning.

There's probably no other area of state government that has been reformed more than public education. We've made plenty of changes to the system with the goal of improving education outcomes for students. Where we've come up short is funding those reforms. The state has a history of giving local school districts new requirements without providing the resources they need to successfully implement those new requirements. These are also called “unfunded mandates.”

Without adequate funding from the state, local districts are increasingly relying on local school levies to pay for basic education – this was at the heart of the historic McCleary decision of the State Supreme Court where it affirmed our constitutional obligation to fully fund basic education. The Court did not demand more reforms, more excuses, or more ideology - the justices told us to come up with a plan to fully fund basic education. We believe that the court remains understandably frustrated with the Legislature because we continue to show them multiple spending plans as our answer to its decision. It's time we also show them how we are going to pay for the plan!

Education – Where We Are

Matthew and Stephanie McCleary are Port Townsend parents of two public school students. In 2007, they filed a lawsuit against the state arguing that the Legislature wasn't adequately funding basic education. The state has constitutional, statutory, and moral obligations to provide adequate funding for basic education opportunities for all students. The Washington State Constitution says funding K-12 education is the state's "paramount duty."

The McCleary's won their lawsuit at both the trial court level and with the state Supreme Court. The court has given the Legislature six years to fund basic education.

However, when the McCleary's filed their lawsuit in 2007, work was already underway to implement sweeping education funding reforms. The old funding model was 14 complicated and unconnected formulas. And each of those formulas had been modified over the years, which resulted in dramatic inconsistencies.

In 2009, the Legislature enacted House Bill 2261, a bill that redefined basic education and created a simplified, transparent, and student-focused funding model. The following year, we enacted House Bill 2776, which laid out and clarified how the state would distribute school funding.

These bold education funding reforms put us back on the right track to meeting our constitutional obligation of fully funding basic education, a point that the State Supreme court agrees with. In its McCleary ruling, the court stated:

"The legislature recently enacted a promising reform package under ESHB 2261...which if fully funded, will remedy deficiencies in the K-12 funding system."

Even this year, we passed more reforms - Senate Bill 6552 will increase the class hours required for high school graduation and establish a 24 credit minimum for graduation. (Many districts are currently in the 20-22 credit range.) To put this simply, students will soon be required to take a more robust and meaningful senior year of courses before going to college, technical training, or directly entering the world of work.

Also within the last few years, we've dramatically improved the teacher/principal evaluation process which has become a nationally recognized model, and adopted the Common Core State Standards that have been adopted by 45 states.

Education – Where We Need To Go

The education structure is in place. So what's missing?

Funding. It all comes down to funding. Speaker Chopp said it best in his opening remarks to kick off the 2013 legislative session. "You want more reform? Well, how about fully funding basic education? That's reform!"

We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

We have an enormous fiscal challenge ahead of us in the coming years. At a minimum, we need to add at least \$3.5 billion in new investments into K-12 schools over the next three years. This funding will be for basic education needs like additional teachers, school bus transportation, supplies, and technology. And assuming we include adequate teacher compensation (the state hasn't provided a cost-of-living adjustment to teachers for the last six years) and local levy relief, we could easily be looking at over \$4.5 billion in needed funding.

Interestingly, even if we could snap our fingers and add \$4.5 billion to the state budget for basic education, our state budget, as a share of the state's economy, would only be at our 40-year average. Even before the 1980's, state government began shrinking as a share of our state's overall economy, and K-12 education and higher education have paid the biggest price for that contraction.

Increasing investments in K-12 is just one leg of the stool. If we expect to be a thriving, highly-educated, highly-trained state, we must also improve the quantity and quality of our early learning programs and dramatically reinvest in higher



education. Washington ranks 4th in the nation for technology-based jobs and 46th for participation in science and engineering graduate programs according to Washington STEM. We need to do better!

Together, we have an enormous challenge ahead of us. An improving economy will help with some of this problem, but projected revenue increases over the next few years alone won't be nearly enough to cover our obligations. All options need to be on the table, including the creation of new revenue streams and closing existing tax exemptions.

Washington state has over 650 tax exemptions and preferential tax rates. Some of these exemptions create jobs, save money elsewhere in the budget, or are otherwise good public policy for taxpayers. Other exemptions however, have proven to be too costly, ineffective, and a bad use of taxpayer dollars.

House Democrats have been leading the way to closing a handful of costly, ineffective tax exemptions to help pay for much-needed investments in education. These efforts have stalled in the Senate. In fact, this year the Senate proposed enacting over a dozen new tax exemptions that would have cost taxpayers over \$250 million over the next four years. This is the wrong direction for Washington and thankfully those efforts were not successful. Can you imagine cutting another \$250 million out of education to fund corporate tax breaks while we are trying to generate an additional \$3-5 billion for basic education? The Senate can keep pounding the drum about "reforms before revenue," but we challenge them to put educational investments before ideology!

But we need to take a step farther than just talking about tax exemptions, we need to reform our 19th Century tax structure. It is no longer responsive to the needs of education and other priority state services. The state cannot find adequate revenue by changing and eliminating tax exemptions alone. We need to look at reforming the business and occupation tax that taxes businesses on their gross revenue and at the sales tax that continues to creep toward 10%.

The conservative Tax Foundation ranks Washington 27th in state and local tax "burden." In other words we are in the bottom half of state tax burdens, but we top the nation in regressivity. If you earn over a million dollars a year you pay less than 2.8 percent in state and local taxes, but if you earn less than \$20,000 a year you pay an exorbitant 16.9 percent. We will never fully fund our schools or lift people out of poverty with this broken tax code.

All sessions are about priorities and choices. The next few years will be no different. With the big education challenges on the horizon, our choice as lawmakers will be between education for over a million school kids in Washington state, or continued tax breaks to a select few.

By the time Representative Reykdal's 4th grade son graduates from high school, these reforms will be firmly in place – but will the funding be in place? The Legislature must make dramatic steps each year to ensure we fully meet our commitment to a quality education for every student. We owe this to coming generations, including Representative Hunt's new grandson.

Helping our veterans

House Democrats advanced measures recognizing that, whether veterans are engaged in a business enterprise, going to college, or pursuing some other endeavor, they have earned our solid support.

We expanded access to higher education opportunities for those that have served in our armed forces by making veterans and their families eligible for in-state tuition immediately, instead of having them wait for a year. We also increased higher-ed credit for training received in the military – veterans shouldn't have to take redundant classes on their way to a new career.



Major Capital Budget projects

Unfortunately in this year's legislative session, the Senate refused to accept the huge need for a supplemental capital budget. Last year's Legislature, however, did adopt a roster of much-needed projects in the capital budget for the current biennium. Here is a list of the most significant items in this construction budget for our district. Additional details for each of these projects can be found at www.fiscal.wa.gov/BudgetC.aspx

2013-2015 Capital Budget

| | |
|---|---|
| Washington Center for the Performing Arts - \$816,000 | Woodard Bay Natural Resources Conservation Area - \$1.96 million |
| SafePlace - \$241,000 | Puget Sound Toxics Sites Cleanup - \$400,000 |
| Behavioral Health Resources - \$1 million | Port of Olympia (contaminated site cleanup) - \$2 million |
| Thurston County Food Bank - \$1 million | Millersylvania State Park - \$1.08 million |
| Housing for Homeless Veterans - \$500,000 | Deschutes Watershed Center - \$7.3 million |
| Chambers Prairie Schoolhouse - \$39,000 | The Evergreen State College Lecture Hall remodel - \$1.3 million |
| Replace General Administration Building - \$82 million | The Evergreen State College Science Center Lab 1 & 2 renovations - \$6.49 million |
| Thurston County Military Readiness Center - \$2.8 million | South Puget Sound Community College Lacey Campus renovations - \$5 million |
| Capitol Olympic Vista Park - \$168,000 | |

New laws that strengthen our values

Workers' rights

Washington state is known for its long tradition of protecting workers' rights. This session, our caucus continued that tradition by introducing bills on paid sick and safe leave, vacation leave, and raising the minimum wage. None of these bills passed, but they did start important conversations about what kind of state we want to live in. At a time when many states are competing in a race to the bottom, the two of us strongly believe in taking Washington in the opposite direction. If we want a strong economy, great schools, working infrastructure, a clean environment, and a high quality of life, we must start by paying people a living wage that keeps families out of poverty and less reliant on public services. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with our colleagues in the House and Senate.

DREAM Act

We passed the Dream Act! The Dream Act extends the opportunity for success to all students regardless of where they're from. It is our constitutional and moral obligation to educate all children in Washington who, through no fault of their own, are not citizens. Children who work hard and play by the rules should not be turned away from being contributing members of our state due to the cost of a college education. With the passage of the Dream Act, these students now get the opportunity to compete for financial aid.



New laws that... (continued)

Mercury-containing fluorescent lights



Old, mercury-containing fluorescent lights present a danger to public health and safety. It should be as easy to recycle these mercury-containing fluorescent lights as it is to buy them in the first place. A bill sponsored by Rep. Hunt and signed by the governor, HB 2246, directs our state to launch a sustainably funded recycling program to work for everyone, including retailers and producers.

Stopping abuse of disabled parking permits

The abuse of special-parking placards and licenses for people with disabilities has long been a severe problem here in our state. Another Rep. Hunt bill – HB 2463 – signed by Governor Inslee will increase penalties for people who improperly display a placard. Both the serial number and the expiration date must be clearly visible from 10 feet or drivers may be cited by law enforcement. It's now a misdemeanor to sell a parking placard, special-license plate, special year tab, or identification card that has been issued for a person with disabilities. Stronger laws against abuse and misuse of special-parking privileges should go a long way toward providing more parking spaces for people who have genuine, legitimate parking rights.



Representative Sam Hunt
Representative Chris Reykdal
PO Box 40436
Olympia, WA 98504-0436



PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 1885